# Creating a safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environment[[1]](#footnote-1)

This activity and guidance can be used alongside any of the British Red Cross teaching resources; they are designed to support teachers to create safe, inclusive, and supportive learning environments in which to explore a wide variety of topics, values, and concepts.

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## Introduction

Creating a safe, inclusive and supportive learning environment is essential to enable children and young people to explore topics, their own experiences, and the experiences of others safely and sensitively in order that they can learn in a positive, supportive and empowering environment.

Whilst exploring the teaching resources with children and young people, maintain an awareness that some learners may have first-hand experience of some of the situations being explored as part of the resources. This document provides you with a range of guidance, support and two activity ideas; to ensure that learners feel safe, supported and encouraged to deepen and further their learning, either by choosing to participate or being able to pass if they don’t feel able to contribute.

Each school will have its own safeguarding, child protection, confidentiality and other relevant policies, as well as knowledge of learners with particular needs or backgrounds that may need extra support, including the protocols that work best for them. We encourage you to familiarise yourself with the policies and protocols in your school or organisation before delivering a session. This document can be used in conjunction with your policies and context, to ensure children and young people feel safe, supported and included in their learning.

Where existing ground rules are used in PSHE education lessons, these should be revisited and adapted in accordance with the proposed lesson content.

# Guidance

## Managing sensitive or challenging content

Some learners in your class may have first-hand experience of or have family or friends that have experienced some of the content within the resource and may find some sessions potentially challenging and/or upsetting. For example, when exploring first aid resources a learner might have experience of having an asthma attack or know someone who has had a heart attack; it may bring back memories or bring up questions for other members of the class.

Before delivering a session, it is essential to consider who is in your group and the experiences and backgrounds they bring. You may know learners’ personal circumstances already or can consult pastoral or safeguarding teams to understand who may need additional support. Ensure learners are aware of what you will be covering so that they can opt out of the session if they wish or that they have a designated person to speak to if needed. You can use the group agreement activity later in this document at the start of sessions to ensure learners are clear on what they can share and who they can go to for support if required. It is important to be clear to learners that if a disclosure is made, you will follow the safeguarding procedures, which may include passing information on.

Ensure that learners are aware that they can access support or further guidance after sessions, ensure you identify who this is in your school; this is likely to be pastoral care or safeguarding teams, the school nurse, or a designated trusted adult. They can also find support through other organisations outside of school if they need to talk to someone about their experiences. Some key contacts could be:

[NSPCC](https://www.nspcc.org.uk/keeping-children-safe/our-services/childrens-services/)

[ChildLine](https://www.childline.org.uk/)

[Barnardo’s](https://www.barnardos.org.uk/)

# Guidance

## Answering questions safely and appropriately: creating opportunities for open discussion

A safe, inclusive and supportive learning environment helps learners explore values and actions, express themselves, listen to others, develop empathy and share their ideas and feelings.

Fostering an environment of open discussion can support learning around a variety of topics.

Sometimes learners may have questions that are complex or challenging to unpack and answer.

This guidance suggests some options for how to approach answering questions safely and appropriately.

**Options for managing a complex or challenging question:**

* Praise learners for asking questions.
* Show that you value the question; ask the learner for any clarifying points if needed.
* It is fine for you not to know the answer to a question and to let the learner(s) know this – this can create a supportive feeling of “learning together”.
* Explain that this is a very interesting question that deserves a thorough answer; say you will come back to the learner/class once you have had time to look into it.
* Consider whether you need to explore a topic in more depth to answer the question(s). You can explore specific topics using British Red Cross teacher briefing guidance to support you, such as [talking to children about major emergencies](https://www.redcross.org.uk/get-involved/teaching-resources/talking-with-children-about-a-major-emergency) and [talking to young people about major emergencies](https://www.redcross.org.uk/get-involved/teaching-resources/talking-with-young-people-about-a-major-emergency).
* For other questions you might consider consulting a colleague or senior colleagues, looking at any relevant school policies including safeguarding, if needed.
* Before answering, you could ask the learner what they think the answer is and build on their existing understanding.
* Consider the appropriate response to a question; for example, a short, simple answer for a whole class; or taking more time to answer questions after a session if the answer is more specific or in-depth than you are able to go into in the lesson. For the latter, you could value the question but explain it goes beyond what you’ll be exploring in class today and that you can pick this up with them/the class later or at another time (make a note of this).
* It is good practise to use an anonymous questions box or ‘ask it basket’ before, during and after the session, to allow for pupils to ask any question that they may have. Ensure you address these questions in line with the policies in your school or organisation.

You can use the group agreement activity in this document to support you with enabling open discussion and creating a safe environment to answer questions safely and appropriately.

# Guidance

## Using distancing techniques as part of some learning activities

Distancing techniques help to keep learners emotionally safe, giving them the chance to consciously step back, debrief and return to “normal” after an activity. Using techniques to distance the learning allows pupils to explore these topics objectively and ‘at a distance’. Within the resource this is done by introducing learning through the use of characters, film and scenarios or role plays to discuss the topics.

You can help to ensure learners feel comfortable and supported when discussing first aid situations by:

* Before starting, discuss the concept of ‘distancing yourself from the action’; this can mean becoming a character, and reminding learners at the end of the role play to ‘come out of role’.
* Ensure there is space to debrief at the end of the session
* Avoid asking learners to discuss incidents where they have used or witnessed first aid in the past. If they choose to share a personal story with the class, allow them to speak and be heard, and then follow up with them about it privately if needed.
* Allow students to opt out of the session or particular activities or skills if they wish to do so, and have a safe space where they can go instead.
* When watching others’ role plays or presentations and feeding back, ensure there is a structure for the feedback (see feedback technique activity below). If you use feedback, ensure everyone in the group knows the criteria.
* Signpost learners clearly to the people and place they can go to for support in their school if they need to follow up with someone after an activity.

# Activity

## Feedback technique: two stars and a wish

If you choose for the group to feedback on each other’s role plays or presentations, they could use the “two stars and a wish” structure:

* Each group is allocated another group that they will give feedback to.
* They watch the presentation or role-play, taking notes if needed and then formulate their feedback using sensitive and supportive language, structuring comments as two positives (two stars) that they thought went well or helped others learn or showed skill; and one area for development (a wish) that they thought could be improved or developed.

# Activity

Creating a group agreement Suggested timing: 5–10 minutes

Developing a group agreement or ground rules with your class creates the basis of a safe learning environment supporting more open discussion; in particular, resources that have a focus on skills, values and attitudes, where pupils will be exploring potentially new ideas and developing their own thinking and opinions, can benefit from a group agreement. Group agreements can also help with managing any unexpected disclosures or comments.

Group agreements are most effective when they have been developed with learners; you can help to strengthen the agreement by modelling the behaviours in your communication and approach.

This activity suggests how to set a group agreement with your class, helping learners to consider: how they would like to work together, what rules and boundaries they would like in place in the sessions, and how they can help and support one another to engage in the topic(s) and their own learning.

Revisiting the group agreement during class or at the start of sessions can help to maintain a safe, inclusive and supportive learning environment; and can be an opportunity to renegotiate or emphasise the agreement.

Ask the class to think about a time when they had rules or agreements for a group of people. They might suggest school rules or rules during a game or sports match. Suggested discussion questions:

* What other kinds of groups might someone create rules or agreements for?
* Why is it important to have rules that everyone agrees to?
* How can they help keep people safe?
* Why are these rules or agreements useful or effective in keeping people safe?

Show the prompt ideas from the [Creating a safe, inclusive and supportive learning environment](https://www.redcross.org.uk/get-involved/teaching-resources/creating-a-safe-inclusive-and-supportive-learning-environment)group agreement slide.

 

Ask the learners to form pairs and discuss what group rules they would like for the whole group.

Ask for ideas from the group, capturing them on a flipchart so that they can be used again. Remind the learners that this is a group agreement: anyone in the group can refer to the group agreement at any time to help keep everyone on track.

If you have more than one session you can return to the group agreement at the start of each session, reminding the group of their ideas and asking them if there is anything they would like to add, and if anything has changed, or needs addressing or a different approach.

1. The information in this document is derived from and supported by the PSHE association guidance <https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)